


# Paradigmatic Shifts in Doctoral Research: Reflections Using Uncomfortable Reflexivity and Pragmatism

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## Abstract

This article discusses a doctoral study, completed by a then full-time teacher in a Pupil Referral Unit in the north of England, which shifted from a mixed-methods action research project to one that was largely autoethnographic in approach. This incorporated the use of fictionalized data. The aim of the project, both at conception and after the change of focus, was to inform the ongoing practice specifically related to the context of the setting. The former doctoral student and supervisor reflect upon the paradigmatic shift that this entailed, drawing upon a complex conceptualization of reflexivity, and pragmatism, to account for the underlying rationale and affordances of this shift. The uncomfortable realities that were experienced during the doctoral study as a result have given way to a different orientation on the project in the light of subsequent reflection. Consideration of a pragmatist understanding of language in relation to research ends has repositioned the nature of the paradigmatic shift. The confidence to change methodological approaches during a doctoral thesis is explored.

## Keywords

reflexivity, autoethnography, ethnography, pragmatism, mixed methods, action research

## Reflexivity and Paradigmatic Repositioning

In this article, we discuss and reflect on an autoethnographic doctoral study (Woodley, 2017) from two particular perspectives, that of a doctoral supervisor and a student, and at two time points. Regarding the time points, firstly, we examine the paradigmatic shift that underlay the decision to move from a mixed-methods study in an action research format to an autoethnographic study in which data were fictionalized. Secondly, reflecting after the completion, we draw on Rorty's (1982) pragmatist account to situate this move somewhat differently in less rigid terms, presenting an argument for what pragmatism could afford researchers in similar positions.

The starting point, envisaging the doctorate as a more traditionally situated mixed-methods study, was in part to do with Woodley's normative understanding about the validity of qualitative research and a belief that doctoral research in education should follow a structured and widely utilized methodology. Despite a plethora of bespoke criteria created for the field of qualitative research (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), positivist criteria for valid knowledge production still exert a generalizing force in the evidence-based discourse of educational research. Yardley (2008) brings together many of the newly promoted qualitative criteria into four key dimensions:

sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. While all these pertain to Woodley's thesis, we discuss particularly the first of these as emanating from Woodley's reflexive stance that led to an unavoidable paradigmatic shift during this doctorate. The last of these dimensions, impact and importance, then characterizes the discussion that follows about how pragmatism could help us to reconceptualize this shift.

Woodley's initial intention had been to write a thesis based on action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), envisaging that this would follow the six steps that distinguish action research from other research processes (Altrichter et al., 2013). This action research would take place in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in the north of England and lead to the

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development of a tool kit for teachers working with young, permanently excluded children. PRUs are short-term specialist settings that support pupils with a range of needs that affect their ability to attend a mainstream school. The resultant autoethnography, encompassing fictionalized data, was in part a response to the pupils' engagement with the research. While the pupils engaged minimally with the original methods, they did not engage in a way that led to useful data, and therefore, Woodley attempted to follow their lead through ongoing dialogue and the desire to make some broad generalizations by way of meaningful representations, in order to communicate their experiences, as highlighted by Langman (1998). The move to autoethnography was also a result of taking seriously authorial/practitioner voice and Woodley's focus on the pupils' own identity in the research, by configuring their life in story form (Bamberg, 2011), through a process of self-reflexivity. The thesis therefore became an exploration of a teacher's journey researching, and then representing, pupil voice within a PRU. Salient outcomes are both methodological, as we discuss in this article, and substantive, in terms of implications for practitioners in this field relating to pupil and teacher voice and identity (Woodley, 2017).

### Reflexive Shift

In the first place, we account for the shift to an autoethnographic research design as one based on taking seriously reflexivity in this project. Pillow (2003), in a paper on the uses of reflexivity for qualitative research methodology, traces the antecedents of the concept we now regularly employ to a long tradition from the Enlightenment era. The 1970s anthropological response to critiques of colonial ethnographic methods has resonated broadly, evoking in researchers a stance which attests to their research "with" and not "on" participants (Clark, 2004), to a host of co-constructed methods, and to research ethics continuing to take a more prominent place in the construction of methodologies not just as a bolt-on afterthought.

Pillow's focus is on the various uses—often implicit—of reflexivity and identifies four reflexive strategies that work together, namely reflexivity as recognition of self, reflexivity as recognition of other, reflexivity as truth, and reflexivity as transcendence. Pillow describes the first, the disclosure of one's subjectivity, as important in that marking where the self can be said to end and another begins is crucial in researching another. This is linked to how self-conscious qualitative researchers are about their subjectivity and power relations, for instance, whether they might consider themselves to be in some ways privileged or not, an insider or outsider researcher. This awareness of standpoint and positioning speaks to how near or far we see ourselves from our subject and what we do in the process of negotiating this nearness or distance. Pillow (2003) suggests that in a postmodern vein such disclosure can be both limited and limiting and depends upon the researcher's ability.

Meanwhile in terms of reflexivity as recognition of other, "we have to continually question the capability of the subject to define her/his self or even the desire of the subject to do so"

(Pillow, 2003, p. 185). In terms of reflexivity as truth, we may be promoting our reflexivity as a means of making our research more legitimate, valid, and truthful, and ultimately our need for validation. The risk is that it is still our own need, as researchers, for the primacy of "truth." Pillow (2003) goes on to suggest that self-reflexivity can allow researchers to experience a transcendent freedom. This, for Pillow, holds reflexivity firmly within an Enlightenment ideal of truth and understanding. In place of this, Pillow posits the concept of "uncomfortable reflexivity," or a reflexivity that seeks to know, but also positions this knowing as uncertain. What is particularly salient for our purposes is how such a problematized reflexivity might be negotiated, and in respect of this, Pillow refers to exceeding the boundaries of ideological theory and practice. We pick up this point below in discussing the affordances that pragmatism brings in conceiving of an uncomfortable reflexivity that exceeds ideological theory and practice.

### Knowing the Other

In the case of Woodley's doctoral project, which we describe in detail in the next section, there emerged a suspicion early on about the extent to which one can "know the other," which then became part of the difficult decision to fictionalize the data that were generated. This resulted in both fictionalized data and composite characters, both types of ethnographic fiction (Davis & Ellis, 2008), or fictionalized ethnography (Reed, 2011). In part, these ethnographic fictions are one medium through which the voices of the silenced and excluded can be heard (Sparkes, 1997). This move also arose from a particular reflexive understanding, in Pillow's terms linked to reflexivity as recognition of self and reflexivity as recognition of other, that of the deconstruction of the bounded researcher and research subject. Since Woodley became more reflexive about how far the data collection depended on the interrelationship with the pupils, the unified and bounded subject of modernity was not going to function in any meaningful way in this study, yet this only became apparent during the data collection process itself. The relational context of the data generation and the flexible, responsive manner in which data necessarily were cocreated in a second cycle of data collection, alongside Woodley's own self-reflexive learning through a research journal, drove the project into a postmodern space of deconstructed subjectivities.

Woodley was far from committed to such an ideological space that foregrounded the indeterminacy of the subject however. The process of critical reflexivity that was engaged in precisely in order to attend to the issues of authenticity, ethics, and standpoint outlined above (in relation to reflexivity as recognition of self and other in particular) necessitated the ontological shift broadly from realist to interpretivist. This was a shift from objective text production, to a more fluid and multifaceted text creation with fictionalized elements. Woodley ultimately stepped back from any "knowing" of the subjects, to a full acknowledgment of, and accounting for, the relational engagement with them. This implicated Woodley's own subjectivity in the process of data collection and text

construction, as much as it did theirs, which therefore led to the adoption of autoethnography as the only meaningful research design that could be pursued. The research was no longer an action research in the sense that there are no longer iterative cycles, but rather one point at which the data collected were assimilated and analyzed in order to create the fictionalized accounts. But more pertinently, it was the paradigm shift from realist to interpretive that marked the transition point in the doctoral journey based on this particular mode of reflexivity.

Pillow (2003), in focusing on examples of this, believes that such self-questioning in qualitative research leads to a greater depth of engagement. We would argue that Woodley's project adopted the critical use of reflexivity advanced by Pillow, in defamiliarizing both the researcher and the researched and, as Pillow suggests, at times even confronting a failure of our language and practices:

The qualitative research arena would benefit from more "messy" examples, examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research (2003, p. 193).

We offer an account of and reflection on Woodley's research process as one such example.

## Uncomfortable Realities

The shift toward autoethnography was an "uncomfortable reality" for Woodley in part because the methodology did not sit easily with existing views on the validity of qualitative research. Writing at the outset of the doctorate Woodley was clear that she did not want the research to be narcissistic or vague (Woodley, 2017). This dovetails with the many critiques about such research, for instance, Denzin's own cautions about the risks inherent in trying to write a reflexive text: "narcissistic texts, texts preoccupied with their own reflexivity, good and bad poetry, politically correct attitudes, too much concern for language . . ." (1997, p. 226, quoted in Pillow, 2003, p. 187).

Woodley's initial focus was to use a mixed-methods action research approach to try and illicit the perspectives of the pupils in the class who all had a permanent exclusion. Woodley approached this research with several key principles. Firstly, a desire to challenge many of the preexisting assumptions about pupils who attended a PRU in order to share experiences of working with them and provide practical knowledge to help other teachers understand how similar pupils might be feeling (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Secondly, the need for the pupils to be full participants in the research by conducting it with them, using general principles of reflection, inquiry, and transformative action (Heron & Reason, 2006). The methods used would ultimately result in co-constructed research (Todd & Nind, 2011) with an awareness that, as a teacher, there might be a tendency for Woodley to believe that she knew everything about the pupils' world view due to the nature of power relationships within the classroom environment (Delpit, 1988).

Finally, the action research methods were to be firmly rooted in a realist ethnographic approach with Woodley, in the role of teacher and researcher, actively building an understanding of the pupils' social world through an ongoing dialogue with the class (Coulter, 1999). This dialogue took a variety of forms, including pupils asking Woodley to engage in their play or discussing their work with her as part of their normal classroom relationships. Woodley's research aim was thus to compare the pupils' written accounts of themselves with their presentation through play and dialogue, which would enable triangulation of responses to draw out common themes. The aim here was to present a synoptic look at the pupil accounts compared to the information gathered for the formal school exclusion data. The agenda, even at the outset then, was not to impose yet another adult understanding on what the pupils offered, and hence, there was an early recognition of the need to step back from the process and consider how to present what was given.

Due to Woodley's role within the classroom, she planned research around the six half terms of the UK school year, using relevant sessions to minimize disruption for the pupils. A spiral research design was used with a looping cycle in the middle sections that would allow her to review and redesign the research (McIntyre, 2008). The research activities were designed to be familiar to the pupils: short written/drawn activities, as well as the use of photographs, framed and supported by teacher input. Largely, the activities had a strong visual element, as it had been highlighted as a useful way of working with children (Pink, 2013), although many of them also had a kinesthetic element, due to the importance of play in researching with young children (Vygotsky, 1933/1966). The research involved the pupils taking photographs of areas of the setting that mattered to them, using toy figures in planned play sessions, and creating Pupil View Templates (PVTs; K. Wall, 2008) around different scenarios relating to their exclusion. As the pupils were coresearchers, they were allowed to choose if their work was included in the data collection; if they wanted Woodley to use a piece of work, they would leave it in a specified tray.

One of the pupil case studies, known in the research as "Liam," became a central figure. As part of the data collection in the first school term, Liam completed five written pieces, four photos of areas of the building that held meaning, and two photos using figures. After the first data collection, Woodley identified several issues with the methods chosen. Firstly, although there were differences in all of the pupils' work, Liam had a tendency to be influenced by, and in turn influence, others. As the methodology was reliant upon being part of normal classroom practice, this was unavoidable. Secondly, the data collection was difficult because the pupils could select what they wanted to include. Although Liam had completed numerous pieces of work, the amount submitted was minimal. Why this happened was unclear and something Woodley felt unable to address without influencing Liam's choices through recourse to her power as the teacher. Thirdly, some of the methods used, such as PVTs, required a confidence in literacy skills that Liam did not have, and the collected written work did

not always reflect the self-expression and awareness that Liam appeared to have in conversation.

Woodley reflected upon the methodology at this stage and, while she still believed that action research and an adult-led approach could be beneficial, she accepted that it was not producing the amount or depth of data that initially it was assumed it would. Woodley identified several issues. Firstly, the belief that the research should be coproduced with the pupils meant giving them an element of control in choosing what they wanted to submit. Secondly, Woodley had reflected on the project through a series of research journals, and these rich descriptions and personal reflections gave context to the data collection, but were at this stage outside of it. Thirdly, due to the social and emotional needs of the pupils, lessons were disrupted due to challenging behavior. This meant that research activities often took several sessions to complete and there was a backlog of incomplete tasks.

Finally, Woodley came to an awareness that the research data depended entirely on the relationship she had with the pupils; if the research were to be truly coproduced, the pupils would have to have a greater input into what was collected and how, and when the collection—or coproduction—would take place. Secondly, the opinions that were shared in the PVTs were greatly influenced by the direct teaching that had supported the process; they were therefore the result of intensive adult support and direction. Finally, the pupils' personal lack of response in handing in a PVT could not be ignored—none of them selected (or made) their own version of a PVT in the second data collection phase, for instance. Methodologically, communication through writing for the pupils actually limited the research, as it proved to be a barrier to communication and therefore a barrier to accessing pupil voice.

During this period of reflection in the mid and toward the end of the first data collection phase, Woodley stopped asking the pupils to complete tasks that were specifically for the purposes of research, although the data tray remained in the classroom. Just before the end of the second half term, Woodley found a book in the data collection tray. There was a piece of paper with Liam's name on the inside acting as a bookmark. The page he had wanted to contribute was a cartoon drawing of a child with an angry face. Liam explained that the drawing reminded him of himself when he was angry. Woodley realized that she could either accept Liam's piece of data or dismiss it. This stepping back from the research and reflecting on the pretheoretical commitments of the design intentions allowed Woodley to reengage with the research from a different epistemological framework (Attia & Edge, 2017). Accepting this contribution fitted in with Woodley's beliefs that the pupils should be active participants in the research and that she did not want to colonize the pupils and the stories they might tell (bell hooks, 1992), as well as re-conceptualizing what the nature of active participation could look like. While other researchers may have seen action research as emergent enough to encompass these changes in data collection, Woodley made a decision at this point to only collect data that the pupils had decided to generate themselves, without an adult prompt and

with no further implementation of action research cycles. Based on Liam's piece of data, Woodley also felt that an interpretive paradigm would enable more meaningful analysis, in that this would provide the scope to reconfigure, reinterpret, and in the end, fictionalize the data in order to recreate meaningful narratives.

The aim was to strike a balance between making the research process as naturalistic as possible, so that it did not stand out from her regular teaching practice, while all parties (pupils, parents, staff, and local authority) were aware of what was happening. Added to this the need for a continual dialogue with all parties meant that the research was going to have to be low key (part of day-to-day teaching) and high status (shared with the head teacher) simultaneously. The realization that the research methods Woodley had read about and planned for the initial research design phase were not of use in the setting, indeed actually limiting data collection, was nonetheless frustrating. In spite of the awareness of the potential tensions of pupils being active yet not full participants (Balen, 2006), initial methods of data collection ended up limiting pupils' participation as described above. This resulted in the widening, rather than the narrowing, of the gap between researcher and pupils as collaborators (Beazley et al., 2009).

Over the next two half terms, the pupils submitted a range of different pieces of their own data. On occasion, these were from lessons, such as models they wanted to take a photo of, or they were from free play or social activities. The pieces of data from unstructured sessions included photographs of play equipment such as a doll's house or conversations they asked Woodley to record in a journal. Woodley appreciated that the first research cycle had affected the pupils' ability to create their own data. Liam selected visual methods through which to share his thoughts and feelings and often asked staff to take photos. Reflecting on the initial research cycle where Woodley had often asked for written evidence, it seemed logical that Liam's lack of academic confidence would have affected his willingness to contribute. When Liam shared his visual methods, he wanted to talk at length about his reasons for choosing them. This was also true for the other pupils who began to talk at length about their personal experiences.

As a special needs teacher, Woodley had used visual methods with the pupils during almost every day's teaching. Examples included laminated tabletop cards as well as visual timetables and Makaton. Pupil photographs generated in the research from this point on were used interpretively to explore what they could say about a specific situation, and to understand explicit, rather than theoretical, knowledge (Bohnsack, 2008) because of the potential for multiple interpretations. The photographs positioned the researched as central in that they could frame the picture and these then became the starting point for the pupils' own reflections and the sharing of perspectives (Kaplan et al., 2011). Woodley also perceived that Liam was willing to engage more with discussing his negative behavior and its impact on himself and others, by photographing any damage he had caused. It appeared that he was taking responsibility for his actions and owning them rather than solely

blaming others as he had often done previously. Liam was creating this dynamic identity through access to alternative ways to communicate.

Woodley also became more aware of the significant role of kinesthetic activities with young children, having had experience of using Fisher Price figures and Lego in therapeutic conversations. In particular, Woodley became aware of how research could be incorporated into play sessions (Edwards, 2011). Woodley was keen to explore the use of kinesthetic methods in a more formalized way, drawing on LeGoff's work with pupils who had autism, who found that the familiarity of the toy was motivating and rewarding (LeGoff, 2004). This view is supported by Pimlott-Wilson's (2012) use of Lego Duplo in researching domestic roles, where the familiarity with the bricks normalized the research process. There are drawbacks with kinesthetic methods, as it may be harder for the researcher to keep the research on track, as pupil play may develop away from the researcher's intention (Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). The intention here was to reflect back for others what the pupils had shared in a particular time and space and so to use interpretivism to highlight the contingency of the classroom setting. A combination of visual and kinaesthetic methods has been used frequently in research with children (Linzmayr & Halpenny, 2013) including those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Freed & Bursztyn, 2012) and came to dominate the data collection methods.

Woodley eventually decided that the best way of sharing the research findings was through the use of a storytelling methodology (Clough, 2002). The generation of fictionalized stories meant that Woodley could ethically protect the identities of the pupils (Reed, 2011) while widening the lens of educational research to view the complexities of the classroom situation (Campbell, 2000). These stories became a communication of, and reflection on, the pupils within Woodley's classroom for other researchers through an autoethnographic thesis. The stories were, as Wallace (2010) states, a means of gaining empathy (for their permanent exclusion) and a discussion of professional practice (Woodley's experiences of these pupils within the classroom) that is shared with a wider audience. The stories were developed from the data collected during both the first cycle and subsequent data collection. The fictionalized narratives were also a way of bridging the gap between academia and pupils (Beazley et al., 2009) but although the primary aim was still to feed back into classroom practice, the shift of paradigm meant that this would become more indirect than the direct feedback into practice that had been planned for an action research project.

## Researcher Reflexivity

Alongside the developing pupil narratives, Woodley wrote a personal research journal. This occurred for several reasons. Firstly, Woodley became aware of how autoethnographic writing has been used by others to enter into worlds that have previously been hidden (e.g., Boyle & Parry, 2007); it enabled Woodley to open the door to the hidden world of the classroom

and share the voices of excluded young people in some way. Secondly, autoethnography also enabled Woodley to write about herself into the research as data, allowing a unique perspective to be heard from a researcher situated deeply within the research (S.Wall, 2008). This perspective might have been lost if it were not given such prominence and if the original action research cycles had been adhered to. Thirdly, writing in an autoethnographic style allowed Woodley to link her personal professional experiences with wider cultural and societal issues (Holt, 2008), which was important as it reduced the possibility of the narcissism Woodley had initially feared. The journals moved from simply being a running record of what was done, to becoming a space to link with the research on a deeper level. Woodley had increasingly come to see the importance of her role in the research and the journals as rich data themselves (Conle, 2000). However, Woodley still remained concerned that the interpretation should not be at the expense of the pupils' stories, a warning clearly expressed by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) among others, in their concern about autoethnographic writers placing themselves in the foreground.

Stephenson (2009) has suggested that the act of stepping back from a narrower data collection method to something broader can allow other messages to be heard. For Woodley, this stepping back was a reflective act to enable a broader perspective and to move away from previous frustrations with the quantity of data collected. Woodley had never intended to write about herself, but through a growing reflexivity, she was able to see a connection with the data being gathered and how expanding the methods to include this data could thereby enrich the research. This led to a narrative ethnography (Ellis, 2004) that was re-descriptive of past experiences in order to understand researcher responses and relationships with the pupils in Woodley's class.

Woodley described the experience as an epiphany in understanding. In this sense, reflexivity as recognition of self and reflexivity as recognition of other gave way to reflexivity as truth. Here Woodley came to the uncomfortable reality of necessarily positioning her knowing as uncertain in the more traditional sense of validity. While the original action research project had classroom practice at its core, as it developed into an autoethnographic study with a focus on increasing knowledge and understanding for research, it shifted away from both its original realist framing and its core aim to directly inform classroom practice. It was only through fictionalized stories of their lives that Woodley came to believe she could give a voice to those previously denied the chance to speak and, in this sense, also interrogate who was to benefit from these representations. The gradual development of trust between Woodley and the pupils through reflexivity as recognition of other impacted upon the data gathered, which came to be more personal in its nature. This change of direction in the process of conducting the doctorate might not have happened had Woodley not developed this capacity for reflexivity. This deeper reflection was born out of a time of confusion and challenge, as has been experienced by other teacher practitioners (Freese,

2006) and itself formed part of Woodley's data collection in the completed thesis as it was interpretive in its epistemology.

Woodley's central realization was that the relationships with the class were at their deepest when she was being authentic in line with the notion of a transportable identity (Zimmerman, 1998). This concept allows for features of our identity to have salience across a range of social situations. Zimmerman's original concept limited these to three features, age, sex and race, which are relatively easy to assign. However, Woodley felt that there was a deeper level to transportable identity that was more elusive but nonetheless a core aspect of ourselves that we carry from social situation to social situation. For Woodley, on her doctoral journey, this was her epistemological belief system. The concept of an epistemological belief system was influenced by the research of Perry (1968), with later research expanding and developing the concept (Schommer-Aikins, 2004). Deeply held epistemological beliefs are embedded in who we are and they journey with us wherever we go. They played a significant role in how Woodley engaged with her research, yet were sidelined at the outset. During the data collection phase, the changing nature of Woodley's epistemological beliefs from realist to interpretivist was foregrounded through reflexivity, enabling other connections to become salient for the research. Our later reflections on the doctorate, after it was completed, enabled some further conversations about epistemology to surface.

## Language and Truth

In this article, we also elucidate the outcomes of taking a further reflexive stance on the project, *after* completion, bringing another way of understanding the doctoral journey to the fore and also benefiting from our critical examination of language as the medium for accessing "truth." Alvesson and Karreman (2011) suggest that while we know language is not a simple medium, we continue to use it as if it were. Alvesson and Karreman advocate a position whereby they draw attention to "the *relative* capacity of language to (equivocally) convey insights, experiences and factual information, as well as to recognize the *pragmatic* value of emphasizing its capacity to clarify phenomena" (2011, p. 31). They talk about language as something that perspectivizes to different views and frames, again attesting to the need for, and benefits of, drawing on different vocabularies/languages/frames. The framing of social classification and bodies of knowledge is normatively assumed to be constructed in a language that is more fixed than it is flexible and malleable, but this should not lead us to an open relativism in language use. In Rorty's (1982) terms, we would be significantly aided here by thinking of better or worse languages for the purpose we have and how we articulate and bring into relationship different frames of reference. Woodley's reflexivity can also be construed as a process of reflecting on better or worse languages for the aims set out for the doctoral study, and in this sense, we would suggest that Rorty's particular version of pragmatism provides a useful conceptualization of this process.

Rorty's (1982) view of historical contingency is that it shapes particular metaphors and languages, such that old metaphors and languages disappear to be replaced by new ones. Rorty's anti-essentialism is key to this epistemology—there is no essential nature of things, and as such, there is no intrinsic aspect or property of anything that data can represent transparently, accurately, or with validity, to use the language of positivism. Losing our belief in an essential reality, truth, or knowledge, on Rorty's pragmatist account, does not amount to endless interpretative possibility and hence relativity—the fear that Woodley initially held. There is a criterion by which we establish warrant and this is utility—How useful to us is the knowledge that we espouse? The only way of assessing utility is in practice. We test out our knowledge claims and forms of language in the world. In testing out the usefulness of our knowledge claims in action, we also come to find out more about them and about those of others, with the potential to have the opportunity to better understand the underlying values of our differing positions. We would link the idea of an uncomfortable, critical reflexivity to this pragmatist perspectivizing process which, through reflexivity, led Woodley to focus and refocus on the utility of her developing knowledge. It could be said to be this constant testing out of the knowledge claims in practice that shaped the trajectory of the project and provided the impetus and content, for the considerable reflexivity that Woodley engaged in.

This has parallels with Dewey's (1958) foregrounding of experience in the context of knowing, and the role of knowledge as being not about faithfully representing reality, but about generating a new understanding of experience for the subject by virtue of that new knowledge. There is much here that seems to express Woodley's doctoral journey. The initial methodological design focused on a particular form of valid, realist representation, which gave way as a result of the experiential and transactional nature of knowing that Woodley's reflexive stance brought to the fore, to an altered methodological design that could take account of the epistemological shift to interpretivism described in this article. The initial conception of validity, which rested on an abstract conception of the rigor and robustness of the data collection methods, also gave way to a notion of validation which drew from experience. As Caine et al. (2017) state, "given that our representations arise from experience, we must seek validation with the experiences of the participant and researcher" (p. 216). In placing as central the relationship with the pupils in the construction of the data, Woodley also then shifted her understanding of validation and representation toward concepts that were entirely imbricated in the experiences of the participants, in relationality and context, and hence in interpretivism.

## Fictionalization

The process of fictionalization likewise served a purpose here, in that it could "be understood as analysis in another manner, creating another layer to deepen awareness" (Caine et al., 2017, pp. 217–218). It could also be seen as a relational act by being

both an opportunity to form a closer research relationship with participants and to engage the academic audience in a different way (Caine et al., 2017). Particularly useful here is Rorty's supposition that we take the irreducibility of one language to another to imply something ontological. It is arresting to take on board the suggestion that this need not be the case:

Thinkers get hooked on particular philosophical methods or positions because, whether they are aware of it or not, they are deeply attracted by the embedding or associated images or metaphors. (Malachowski, 2002, p. 46)

On this account, even the most supposedly detached of philosophical positions rests on something other than intellectual claims. This opens up the powerful notion that whether we are talking about fictionalized data, autoethnography as method, or positivist data, there is something in the metaphors of these different languages that draws us in. Something that speaks to more than just intellectual claims, narrowly construed along relational lines. The development of philosophical ideas and approaches is not, by this reading, the development of a panhuman reason. Rather, it is a cultural and historically contingent conversation that we have, with different vocabularies coming to the fore and then falling away as different priorities are realized. The choice to adopt an autoethnographic approach in Woodley's project, with the use of fictionalized data, could be said to be a result of the reflexive assessing and reassessing of priorities and knowledge. It was rooted in the cultural and historical space of the study and might not have been the decision of any researcher in that position. Indeed, it might not have been construed as a paradigm shift by another researcher who might have been content to see the emergent nature of action research methodology as able to encompass the developments described above. Woodley's disposition to assess her knowledge claims against her experience of the context was resultant in a research design that had to change and proved to be more efficacious in this case because of her own positionality and relationality in the given context and in terms of her pupils. We should, therefore, guard against seeing reflexivity as "an epistemological choice" in some abstract and individualistic conception of choice. Rather, it was contingent in ways that we might often fail to account for due to our own cultural and historical contingencies.

## Conclusions

Thinking through the project with a pragmatist orientation, there is of course the lack of the need for criteria by which to judge knowledge claims at all. This should be seen as a liberation according to Rorty (1982). We no longer need to demand constraints through particular criteria, which we might think of in paradigmatic terms. Rather, we open out the conversation to include all the vocabularies and voices that have something to say as relevant data. This is how we now come to understand how Woodley came to open out her research design to incorporate more flexible, creative methods, which generated

multiple and varied sets of data. These were then woven together in a way that was no longer pinned down either to the original research design or to any particular epistemological constraints. A pragmatist focus is firmly on the ends we have in mind, not on our methods for getting there, which then necessitates research reflexivity of the kind arguably epitomized by Woodley in this project, in crafting the optimal methods to arrive at our particular ends.

Therefore, the pragmatist relationship to language is not that it represents, mirrors, or in any other way corresponds with an external reality. In this sense, "There is nothing to be known about an object except what sentences are true of it" (Rorty, 1982, p. 55). This can be in the Deweyan sense of knowledge that we are justified in believing and as such, something that is a social phenomenon, rather than in relationship to external reality. In this sense, Rorty (1982) says that language for Dewey is a tool, rather than a picture. Of pragmatism, Rorty gives this characterization: "it is the doctrine that there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones—no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of the mind, or of language" (1982, p. 165). Alternatively, the real issue is between "those who think our culture, or purpose, or intuitions cannot be supported except conversationally, and people who still hope for other sorts of support" (1982, p. 167). Woodley's uncomfortable reflexivity afforded the means of relinquishing initial forms of paradigmatically defined support, to arrive at a place where it was the wider conversation as it developed and then was (re)presented, that defined the research. This quality of "willingness to talk, to listen to other people, to weigh the consequences of our actions upon other people" (1982, p. 172) Rorty suggests is more accurately described as a moral virtue, rather than as the positing of any theoretical arguments about essence.

For pragmatists of this orientation, the conversation here is its own end with the language one of cumulative human endeavor in creating meaning. On this view, some of the high philosophical and numinous claims for language representing something essential may be lost, but arguably the common humanity and moral quality of the research enterprise is strengthened. Rorty describes this loss of the metaphor of representation as the possibility of thinking primarily of ourselves as members of a moral community, which we could suggest is precisely the position that Woodley came to adopt. The predisposition to arrive at valid knowledge claims and direct outcomes gave way to a morally inflected orientation toward the research being undertaken in a specific context, with specific participants that best represented the contingent nature of the research process. Many of the decisions subsequently made, such as the use of fictionalization to enrich the language through which Woodley could relay the analysis and (re)present the data, were oriented to this moral end. In this way, the project could be understood to have exceeded ideological theory and practice.

On a pragmatist understanding of Woodley's project, we might therefore want to reflect on how a reflexive stance led, inevitably, to asking what language works best for a given

purpose. We would suggest that this kind of question is only properly arrived at through an uncomfortable reflexive stance to the research being undertaken—one that works with a conception of reflexivity as something that unsettles and challenges in the ways that Pillow (2003) defines. We might also want to say that this understanding of language is not one that necessarily best corresponds to the reality of what we are feeling and experiencing as researchers at a given point in time, but one that is most useful and creatively most meaningful.


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